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Department of State

INFO: Amembassy SANTIAGO

Amembassy RIO DE JANEIRO

January 13, 1971

Six Brazilians Asylees Granted Safe Conduct to Chile

On January 8, the Ministry of Justice granted safe conduct to six Brazilians who had taken political asylum in the Chilean Embassy. According to the press, they departed for Santiago on January 11 at 10:15 p.m. on a LAN-Chile flight.

Of the six, four had taken refuge at the Chilean Embassy in Rio de Janeiro. Three are Catholic University students, namely Marijane Vieira Lisboa, Martha Maria Klagebrun and Maria Savaget Fiani, the last of whom has also worked as a journalist. Although never formally charged, the six girls were arrested in September 1969 and held in prison for more than a year because they were suspected of belonging to the outlawed radical Catholic group "Popular Action". As they were leaving women's prison on October 6, 1970 following their release, they were "kidnapped" by armed men in civilian clothes who are believed to be agents of the military police. Only after the military court which had authorized their release had met three times to demand their release and to request the Government and the police forces to respect its decision and after an extensive search of prisons, were they finally located and re-released on October 26. They were re-arrested on November 1, however, at the time of "Operation Birdcage" (see Rio's 7892) and held for three days, again with no formal charges.

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being made by the authorities. Shortly after their latest release, they decided that they no longer had any future in Brazil and on the advice of their families contacted the Chilean Embassy.

The fourth Rio de Janeiro asylee was Marcos Pedro Viana, a 22-year old student of economics. Viana was also arrested at the time of "Operation Birdcage" because his brother-in-law is involved in subversive activities. According to Viana, as told to a contact at the Chilean Embassy, he himself was not tortured, but he was given a tour of what he claimed to be the Army's "torture" chamber. Moreover, he heard others being "tortured", he said, and was himself threatened with "torture" unless he would agree to help trap his brother-in-law. Only in order to escape did Viana agree but once released sought political asylum at the Chilean Embassy.

A week after the four Brazilians mentioned above had been granted asylum, Dr. Maria Octavia Borges and Dr. Rosita Teixeira Mendonça also requested asylum at the Chilean Embassy in Rio de Janeiro. Due to lack of space in Rio and the fact that the former has a sister who is a nun in Brasilia, they were sent to the Embassy's one-man post in the capital. Dr. Borges is a 35-year old surgeon and Dr. Teixeira is a 48-year old psychiatrist.

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When the authorities learned that they were discussing with friends what they had seen despite warnings to the contrary, they received vague threats of retaliation. At that point they decided it was best to leave the country.

The Chilean Embassy in Rio de Janeiro occupies a duplex apartment in the Flamengo section and the four asylees in that city were housed in what were originally the maid's quarters. Viana and one of the girls each had a tiny maid's bedroom while the two young ladies slept in the pantry. According to a knowledgeable contact at the Chilean Embassy, they were confined to this area and were becoming exceedingly nervous. Ambassador Correa Letelier (who will be leaving shortly) as well as the other officers of the Chilean Embassy were reportedly very unhappy over the prospect of that Embassy becoming the main "escape route" for Brazilian dissidents.

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According to the same source, the Chilean Embassy is painfully aware of the precarious state of Chile's bilateral relations with Brazil following Allende's election and believes that the granting of asylum, while a strong Chilean tradition, can only serve to exacerbate further relations between the two countries. Partially for this reason, the Embassy is accelerating its move to Brasilia where there will be less likelihood of asylum seekers. The Consulate that will remain in Rio de Janeiro will not entertain requests for asylum. Ambassador Correa Letelier led his staff to believe in November that he would not consider new requests for asylum until the six asylees already granted asylum were authorized safe conduct by the Brazilian Government. If pressed he planned to plead lack of physical space even though he could have theoretically allowed new asylum seekers to stay at his spacious residence.

The Ministry of Justice, in announcing the granting of safe conduct to the six asylees, treated the entire matter as strictly routine. A spokesman for the Ministry, when queried earlier about the granting of safe conduct, emphasized that these were handled "routinely" and are not considered "special cases". This practice has existed in the past. Nevertheless, with a Marxist government now in power in Chile each new case of asylum will likely take on special significance.

In a recent conversation with the Embassy's Political Counselor, the head of the Foreign Ministry's legal section went to great lengths in describing his Government's exasperation with the Chilean Embassy's alleged "open door" policy. He claimed that the Embassy stands ready to shield any "common criminal". This, he said, poses problems for Brazil, which is reluctant to adopt a negative stance on the question but cannot allow the granting of safe-conduct to reach ridiculous extremes.

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